

**File Code:** 1950; 2320; 2720**Date:** September 2, 2016**Route To:****Subject:** ADF&G Helicopter Landing to Support Chinook Salmon Surveys in the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness**To:** Wrangell District Ranger

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Thank you for the excellent documentation of the past authorized activities of the ADF&G helicopter use for access to complete Chinook surveys on Andrew Creek in the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness Area. Helicopter access began around 1973 and has continued sporadically for the past 33 years. The agency began authorizing helicopter landings for Chinook surveys in 1996. In 1997 the helicopter landings were approved with a Decision Memo and authorized with a special use permit which has been renewed every five years since. A maximum use of six landings each year has been recorded over the past 20 years. Each time an IDT on the Wrangell Ranger District has reviewed the past NEPA decision, considered the use under that decision and has found the decision from 1996 adequate.

Each new approval of the helicopter landings has been categorically excluded under 7 CFR 1b.3(a)(7) – that is “Categories established by the Secretary for which a case file or Decision Memo are not required.” This year an IDT was convened on WRD to consider continuing the use from 2017-2021. The team reviewed past Decision Memos for this activity, reviewed the conditions and uses on the ground and found that these activities still fit within the past NEPA analysis. They recommend the permit be renewed under the existing NEPA analysis per guidance found in FSH 1909.15-2012-3.

FSM R10 Supplement 2300-2008-2 Section 2322.03 states that all management decisions affecting wilderness must be consistent with the minimum requirement concept in the Wilderness Act. Since this use is within the boundaries of the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness Area, a Minimum Requirements Analysis (MRA) must be completed. The ADF&G submitted a proposal to WRD in 2015 to continue the use of helicopter landings on the South Fork of Andrew Creek in order to conduct the Chinook salmon surveys. Helicopters would be used to transport crews in to Andrew Creek. The crew would then hike out along the creek while conducting the Chinook salmon surveys. Section 1315(b) of ANILCA allows for reasonable access, including the temporary use of motorized equipment for furtherance of research, rehabilitation and enhancement activities.

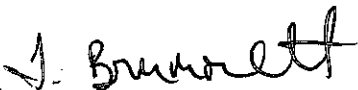
Initially three drainages were considered in the 1997 approval process. It was determined by the IDT that only the South Fork of Andrew Creek would require helicopter access. This ten mile roundtrip would not be feasible to complete in one day and therefore helicopter transport to the upper part of the stream was a reasonable request. The five mile hike down river, collecting data along the way, to the pick-up point could be completed within one day.



The following stipulations that will be included in the special use permit are:

1. A maximum of six helicopter landings are authorized in the South Fork of Andrew Creek drainage to transport crews to the upstream permit area. No more than three surveys per year will be conducted.
2. Only natural openings will be used for helicopter landings. No vegetation will be cut or removed.
3. ADF&G is required to conduct a survey of sensitive plants at the landing zones used.
4. ADF&G is required to maintain helicopter operation separation of at least 1500 feet vertical and horizontal distance from observed mountain goats and key mountain goat habitat in accordance to the 2008 Forest Plan.

With these stipulations included in the special use permit, and you have made the changes, I concur that the ADF&G be allowed to continue landing helicopters on the South Fork of Andrew Creek in the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness Area from 2017 to 2021 and that this use is consistent with the minimum requirement concept in the Wilderness Act. Attached to this memo is a revised proposed permit. Please ensure that once ADF&G signs the permit it is sent to me for signature. Thanks to you and your staff for the work you have done to keep this project moving forward. If you have any questions please call me at 228-6281.

For 

M. EARL STEWART
Forest Supervisor, Tongass NF

Cc: Melissa Dinsmore, Lisa Fluharty, Karen Iwamoto